

Dear Senator Young, et al.,

I am writing to advocate on behalf of Maryland's public charter school students, families, and teachers. As a parent, volunteer, parent representative, and Governing Council Chair at Monocacy Valley Montessori Public Charter School (MVMPCS), I urge you to support SB0646 School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment sponsored by Senator McCray.

As a member of the Senate Budget and Tax Committee, you will have the opportunity to vote on this bill on March 7th. Passing SB0646 is crucial for the more than 24,000 students statewide who attend public charter schools. These schools are an integral part of Maryland's public school portfolio, and the communities, teachers, and staff that work there, the districts that include them, and the students that attend them would all benefit directly from the much-needed funding that SB0646 would provide.

While local education authorities (LEAs) are able to use capital funding and general funds from other sources to support their facilities, operations, and maintenance, public charter schools are not afforded the same resources. SB0646 seeks to establish a fund managed by the IAC that allows public charter schools to apply for up to \$2000 per pupil annually for eligible facilities-related expenses. This funding would come from the State's General Fund and would not impact the Blueprint formula or take funding away from any other public school students. Instead, it would allow more Blueprint dollars to be spent in the classroom on learning instead of on the school's facility. The bill also includes strong parameters around spending accountability and transparency, as well as standard bond bill language on repayment if a school should close or sell a privately-owned building.

Charter school students are public school students and deserve to be educated in safe, welcoming, and adequate school buildings just like their traditional public school peers. Yet, on average, they attend older, more in need of repair, and discarded buildings. Charter school teachers also have to teach in buildings that do not have adequate space, amenities, or supports, while charter school operators have to pull funding out of their Blueprint dollars to pay for their buildings, while traditional schools and LEAs pull from capital funding and general funds. This is inequitable.

As a parent of a student at a public charter school, I have seen firsthand the positive impact that charter schools have had on my children's education. The focused and alternative learning methods have greatly benefited their academic success and overall acceptance in the classroom. However, our school has faced challenges with inadequate infrastructure, which can detract from the learning environment. That is why I strongly support this bill, which would establish a fund to help public charter schools secure good education facilities and complete necessary improvements. By providing financial security for the facility our charter schools, we can ensure that our students are learning in safe and welcoming environments. This will allow our faculty and staff to focus on providing the best possible education and services for our students.

As we celebrate 20 years of the charter school law in Maryland, it is time we fund public charter school facilities. I ask for your support of SB0646, School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment. Please know that not only myself, but the larger charter school community across the state of more than 24,000 families, 50 schools in seven districts, stands behind you.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Robert Weiland